

Kids on holiday, parents on overtime ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

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No matter how much you enjoy your job, you would have to question the sanity of slaving away in an office on a sweltering summer's day, to make money to pay another woman to sit on a beach with your children.

Admittedly, this being Ireland, those days were rare. All the same, excess time with the children in the absence of demanding schedules seemed closer to bliss than an ordeal. A switch to part-time working from home has not altered my view too much - even if that arrangement has its own challenges.

It may not be fun being stuck on a treadmill while all around people seem to be skiving off - but at least full-time working parents of young children have their childcare arrangements in place. For those whose children are too old for childcare but too young for being home alone all day, it is a different story.

While the "overtime" during school holidays can certainly be draining for stay-at-home parents - and mind destroying in the rain - at least they are there for their children. Parents who work outside the home part-time, or who run a business from home, can find the next two months particularly tough - and expensive.

We asked some parents how they cope when school is out:

Stay-at-home father Gerry Day lives in Clondalkin, Dublin with his wife Bernadette, who works part-time, and their children Matthew (12), Sarah (10) and Rory (7)

The Day family will "hit the ground running" at the start of the holidays with all three children going to the Clondalkin Youth Service Summer Project in the community centre, for activities such as kayaking, fishing, days out, games, arts and crafts, at a very low cost - about \$100 for the three of them going most days for two weeks.

For the rest of July, it will be down to Gerry to find ways to entertain them. "There is always this worry that they will come down at 9am, watch Scooby Doo and stay in their pyjamas - and not a lot would be achieved," he says.

Instead, he will try to organize outings to places such as the Ashtown Visitor Centre in the Phoenix Park, Collins Barracks or the "Dead Zoo", sometimes with other dads and their children.

"I think it is a little bit different for men, compared with women who can go around to another woman's house with the kids. As a man you have to be a little more creative and proactive," says Gerry, who was made redundant from the construction industry but will start an arts degree at NUI Maynooth in September.

"Ultimately, I found that if you bring a football and a couple of tennis rackets and spend the time with them, that is what they are looking for. It doesn't have to be high falutin'."

Roles have been reversed for him and Bernadette, who stayed at home for 10 years to mind the children. She is off work during August and they have one week booked in the Nore Valley caravan park in Co Kilkenny, one week in France and two weeks to hang out at home.

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- Reprinted from the Irish Times

Region: Europe ^[2]

Tags: public opinion ^[3]

accessibility ^[4]

fathers ^[5]

parent involvement ^[6]

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/10/06/kids-holiday-parents-overtime> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/public-opinion> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/accessibility> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/fathers> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/parent-involvement>